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Depictive secondary predicates in Spanish and the relative/absolute distinction*

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This study accounts for the unacceptability of individual-level gradable adjectives as (depictive) secondary predicates on the basis of two factors: (a) the semantics of gradable adjectives—specifically the way their comparison classes are formed in the syntax, giving rise to the difference between relative/absolute adjectives; (b) the pragmatic *inference of temporal persistence* that characterizes IL predicates. Absolute adjectives are evaluated with respect to a comparison class composed of counterparts (stages) of an individual, so that the property they express must be interpreted as subject to variation. Therefore, the inference of temporal persistence which seems to be at the basis of the individual-level character of predicates does not arise, giving rise to the stage-level interpretation that absolute adjectives receive. The inference of temporal persistence arises by default in the case of relative adjectives since in the comparison class selected by these adjectives there are no stages (of an individual) instantiating different degrees of the property but just different individuals manifesting different degrees of it. The inference of temporal persistence associated with relative adjectives makes the *simultaneity constraint* required by secondary predication contexts (McNally 1994) trivial and uninformative. As a consequence, only absolute adjectives are allowed in this syntactic environment.

1. Introduction

The distinction between individual and stage-level predicates (IL, SL, henceforth)—implemented in different ways in the literature, and generally considered as a lexical property of predicates—has been taken to explain a wide variety of linguistic contrasts

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in many languages. In Spanish, it has been taken to account for the distribution of predicates with the copulas *ser* ('be_{SER}') and *estar* ('be_{ESTAR}'). Nouns, DPs, and IL adjectives (for example, relational adjectives) combine with *ser*, (1a), while SL adjectives combine with *estar*; this is specifically the case of so-called 'perfective adjectives', morphologically connected with participles and expressing the final state of an event, (1b). *Alternating adjectives* combine with both copulas: this is the case of most qualifying gradable adjectives in Spanish, (1c). Alternating adjectives have received three kinds of analyses within lexicalist proposals that consider the IL/SL character of adjectives a lexical property: (a) they have been analyzed as basically IL adjectives that can be coerced into SL adjectives in certain syntactic contexts (like in copular sentences with *estar*) —this is the most widespread proposal in the literature; (b) they have been analyzed as neutral/unmarked with respect to the IL/SL characterization, with the syntactic context they are inserted in determining their aspectual characterization; (c) they have been analyzed as doubly-marked adjectives (IL and SL) in the lexicon.

- (1) a. *Mi hijo* {*es*/**está*} {(*el*) *presidente*/*vegetariano*}.
 my son is_{SER/*ESTAR} the president vegetarian
 'My son is {the president/vegetarian}.'
- b. *María* {**es*/*está*} {*enfadada*/*enferma*}.
 María is_{*SER/ESTAR} angry ill
 'María is {angry/ill}.'
- c. *Mi hijo* {*es*/*está*} {*alto* / *delgado*/*feliz*,
 my son is_{SER/ESTAR} tall thin happy
nervioso / *valiente* / *ágil* / *fuerte*}.
 excitable courageous agile strong
 'My son is {tall/thin/happy/excitable/courageous/agile/strong}.'

As illustrated in (2), the IL/SL distinction has also been taken to crucially account for the distribution of predicates in depictive secondary predication environments (an explicit definition of depictive secondary predicate will be given in Section 2). As generally claimed (see the references in Footnote 1), IL adjectives cannot appear as depictive secondary predicates. This is the behavior shown by qualifying alternating adjectives lexically classified as IL predicates (recall (1c) *alta* 'tall', *delgada* 'thin', etc.). On the contrary, adjectives lexically classified as stage-level (*enfadada* 'angry', *enferma* 'ill') can appear as depictive secondary predicates.¹ Nominal predicates and relational adjectives will be left aside in this paper.

1. Secondary predicates have been commonly classified into two groups in the literature: *resultative predicates* (which do not exist in Romance languages) and *depictive predicates*. In Spanish, depictives can be subject-oriented, (i), and object-oriented, (ii).

(2)

	Individual-level predicate	Stage-level predicate
Depictive secondary predicates	*/# <i>María llegó alta</i> (lit. María arrived tall)	<i>María llegó enfadada</i> (María arrived angry)
	*/# <i>Ana leyó el libro delgada</i> (lit. Ana read the book thin)	<i>Ana leyó el libro enferma</i> (Ana read the book ill)

Following our proposal in Section 3 explaining the distribution of adjectives in copular sentences in Spanish (Gumiel-Molina, Moreno-Quibén, and Pérez-Jiménez' 2015), in this paper, we show that the behavior of qualifying gradable adjectives as depictive secondary predicates, e.g., (2), can be derived from their gradability properties, namely from the relative/absolute distinction (as defined in Toledo and Sassoon 2011; Sassoon 2013). We assume McNally's (1994) hypothesis that a pragmatic explanation in terms of an inference of temporal persistence associated with IL-predications can account for their ungrammaticality/unacceptability in secondary predication environments. Our claim is that the way in which the comparison class needed to evaluate the adjectival predication within the secondary predication clause is formed, giving rise to relative or absolute gradable adjectives, triggers the inference of temporal persistence for relative adjectives and crucially determines the judgments in (2). Under this viewpoint, we argue that the IL/SL distinction in the domain of secondary predication is connected (or even can be reduced) to the relative/absolute distinction, at least in the domain of gradable adjectives.

Moreover, we claim that gradable adjectives are not relative or absolute (IL or SL) *per se*, but they can be evaluated with respect to a comparison class comprising individuals or stages of individuals. The comparison class is introduced in the syntax by a specific functional node, so that adjectives are not marked as relative or absolute in the lexicon. Our proposal is that the paradigm in (2) derives from two facts: (a) the fact

-
- (i) a. *Juan cocinó los pasteles cansado* / John baked the cakes tired.
 b. *Juan llegó enfadado* / John arrived angry.
 c. *Juan sonrió contento* / lit. John smiled happy (Intended: John smiled happily).
 - (ii) *Pedro recogió rotos los juguetes* / Peter collected the toys broken.

In this paper, we focus on subject-oriented depictive secondary predicates. For a detailed description of these predicates in Spanish see Hernanz (1988), Demonte (1988, 1992), Bosque (1990), Leonetti and Escandell-Vidal (1991), Carrier and Randall (1992), Mallén (1991), Demonte and Masullo (1999), Ardid-Gumiel (2001).

In (2), we use # to indicate pragmatic/semantic ill-formedness. The examples doubly marked as */# have been generally judged as ungrammatical in the literature.

that the syntactic context in (2)—the secondary predication environment—requires an absolute interpretation of adjectives, and (b) the fact that it is difficult to obtain such an interpretation for some adjectives due to the specific dimension they express and how properties are conceived in the real world, as we will explain in Section 5.

The paper is organized as follows: in Section 2 we introduce depictive secondary predicates and also McNally's (1994) pragmatic account for the contrast in (2); in Section 3 we present the difference between relative and absolute gradable adjectives; in Section 4, we argue for the absolute character of gradable adjectives when they occur as secondary predicates; finally, in Sections 5 and 6, we analyze the reason why only absolute adjectives can be secondary predicates and also account for some odd cases of secondary predication (with stative verbs) in pragmatic terms.

2. Depictive secondary predicates. The McNallyan turn

Depictive secondary predicates “express a state the referent of their controller is in at the time the state of affairs described by the main predicate holds” (Rosthein 1983; apud, McNally 1994, 3). In (3) (which is the structure assumed in McNally 1994 for secondary predication), the sentence expresses the simultaneity between the running time of the event (in a broad sense to include states) denoted by the secondary predicate *cansado* and the running time of the main predicate. Depictive secondary predicates are thus subject to a *simultaneity condition*.

- (3) Juan [_{VP} [_{V'} *llegó* (a su casa)] [_{AP=PREDP} *cansado*]].
 Juan arrived (to his home) tired
 ‘Juan arrived home tired.’

Depictive secondary predicates are semantically combined with the main predication via the *Predicative Adjunct Rule*, (4), which gives rise to the simultaneity condition described above (McNally 1994; Rothstein 2011, a.o.).

- (4) Predicative Adjunct Rule (McNally 1994, 7)

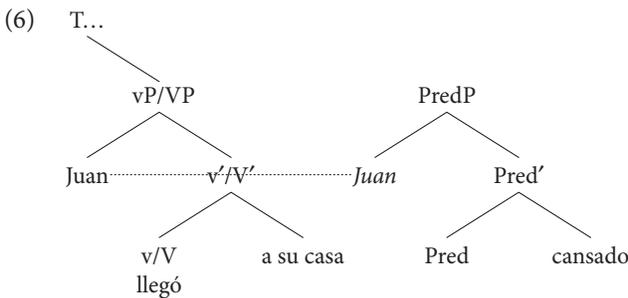
$$\begin{aligned} & \|[V' \text{ XP } [\text{PRED}]_i]_{\text{VP}}\| \text{ (where } i \text{ is the index of the controller)} \\ & = \left\{ \langle e, x \rangle \mid \begin{array}{l} \text{there is an } e', e'' \leq e \text{ such that } V'(e', x), \text{ XP } [\text{PRED}]_i(e''), \\ \text{and } \tau(e) = \tau(e') = \tau(e'') \end{array} \right\} \end{aligned}$$

A sentence like (3) will have the denotation in (5), once the entity argument has saturated the open positions of the main predicate and the adjunct. *Llegó cansado* describes an event with two coextensive parts, the one described by the main predicate, *to arrive*, and the one described by the secondary predicate, *tired*. What (5) amounts to is the

assertion that the two eventualities hold simultaneously during a time span (the running time of the two events).

From the point of view of syntax, let us assume a multidimensional approach (based on Rapoport 1999; Gumiel 2008), where the subject of the sentence is both an argument in the main clause and in the secondary predicative phrase (PredP; Bowers 1993).

$$(5) \left\{ e \left| \begin{array}{l} \text{there is an } e', e'' \leq e \text{ such that } \mathbf{llegar}(e', j), \mathbf{cansado}(e'', j), \\ \text{and } \tau(e) = \tau(e') = \tau(e'') \end{array} \right. \right\}$$



As claimed in the Introduction, and restricting the discussion to qualifying gradable adjectives, only stage-level predicates can occur as depictive secondary predicates, (7). Adjectives usually classified as being lexically individual-level predicates sound odd in this context, (8).

(7) a. *María llegó a su casa {cansada / sola / enfadada}.*
 María arrived to her house tired alone angry
 ‘María arrived home {tired/alone/angry}’

b. *María se examinó {contenta / enferma}.*
 María took-the-exam happy ill
 ‘María took the exam {happy/ill}.’

c. *María leyó el poema {sobria / exhausta}.*
 María read the poem sober exhausted
 ‘María read the poem {sober /exhausted}.’

(8) a. **/# María llegó a su casa {cauta / joven}.*
 María arrived to her house cautious / young

b. **/# María se examinó {alta / inteligente}.*
 María took-the-exam tall / intelligent

c. **/# María leyó el poema {delgada / lista}.*
 María read the poem thin bright

The simultaneity condition makes no distinction between IL and SL predicates. Therefore, in and of itself it does not explain the reason why IL predicates sound bad in the context of secondary predication. To explain this fact, McNally appeals to a pragmatic explanation (see also Condoravdi 1992). She claims that the simultaneity condition must be relevant and informative, hence, non-trivially met. However, according to her, individual-level predicates trigger a pragmatic inference of temporal persistence, (9), which makes the simultaneity condition trivial.

- (9) “Individual-level predicates are associated with an inference of temporal persistence; stage-level predicates are not. The inference of temporal persistence in effect specifies the following: if an eventuality is going on at time t and you have no information that it is not going on at some later time t' , then infer that it is going on at that later [and previous] time t' as well. Note that this is a default inference, surfacing only if there is no information to the contrary.” (McNally 1994, 9)

Given this inference of temporal persistence, the simultaneity condition is trivially met in many cases in out-of-the-blue contexts with IL adjectives, giving rise to infelicitous sentences such as those in (2) and (8). However, note that examples like (10), also containing alternating adjectives (recall the examples in (1c)) are grammatical and acceptable):²

- (10) a. *María llegó a su casa alegre.*
María arrived to her house happy
'María arrived home happy.'
- b. *María se examinó ágil.*
María took-the-exam agile
'María took the physical exam being agile.'
- c. *María leyó el libro feliz.*
María read the book happy
'María read the book happy.'

2. McNally (1994) for English and Ardid-Gumiel (2001) for Spanish also claim that nouns and relational adjectives (both IL predicates) can occur as secondary predicates in sentences expressing transitions.

- (i) *Juan volvió vegetariano de la India.*
Juan came.back vegetarian from the India
'Juan came back from India being a vegetarian.'

We leave for further research a unified account of the behavior of both qualifying adjectives and relational adjectives as secondary predicates.

In those proposals where adjectives are lexically IL or SL, acceptable examples like these could be analyzed as examples containing stage-level adjectives, perhaps as a consequence of a coercion process triggered by the syntactic context; however, Escandell-Vidal and Leonetti (2002) claim that aspectual coercion cannot be triggered in the context of secondary predication, because this context lacks a syntactic trigger of the coercion process (contrary to what happens in copular sentences with *estar*, where the copula itself is the trigger of the aspectual coercion of IL adjectives, recall (1c)). Moreover, proposing a coercion process to explain the grammaticality of these examples leaves unexplained the ungrammaticality/oddness of the examples in (8).

In the following sections, we will recast McNally's proposal, leaving aside the hypothesis that adjectives are lexically individual or stage-level predicates, in order to explain the behavior of qualifying gradable adjectives as depictive secondary predicates. We will show that the crucial property at the core of the paradigm in (7) and (8) is the relative/absolute distinction, which is syntactically built up, to which we turn in the following section. The contrast between (8) and (10) will be explained in Section 5.

3. The relative/absolute distinction

We follow Toledo and Sassoon (2011) in proposing that all gradable adjectives require a standard of comparison established in relation to a comparison class to be interpreted.³ The difference between relative and absolute adjectives is determined by the nature of the comparison class selected in each case. The comparison class of an adjective depends on the individual it is predicated of and can be established based on *variance between individuals* (relative adjectives) or based on *variance within the same individual* (absolute adjectives).

First, an adjective can be evaluated with respect to an extensional comparison class, *C*, composed of individuals sharing some property in the index of evaluation, (11), which defaults to a midpoint standard value. This variance between individuals defines relative adjectives, (12).

$$(11) \quad C = \{y: P(y)\} = \lambda y.P(y)$$

3. The point of view assumed here differs from the hypothesis argued for in Kennedy and McNally (2005), Kennedy (2007), and subsequent work, where it is proposed that the interpretation of absolute adjectives is based on a conventionally fixed standard dependent on the scalar structure of the adjective.

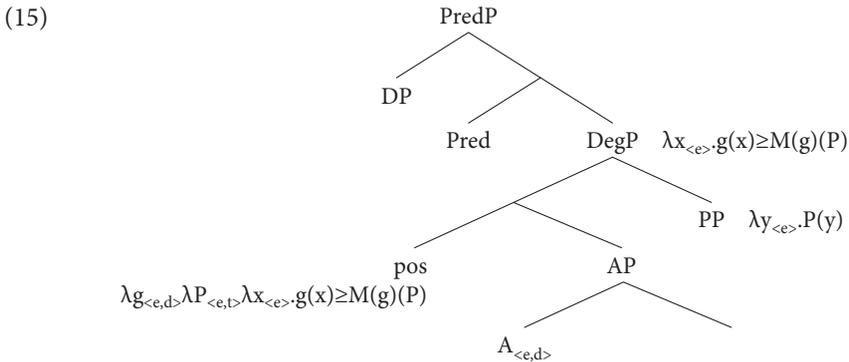
- (12) a. *Juan es* [_{AP} *alto para ser jugador de fútbol*].
 Juan is_{SER} tall for be player of soccer
 ‘Juan is tall for a soccer player.’
- b. Comparison class for *alto para ser jugador de fútbol/tall for a soccer player*:
 $C = \{y \mid \text{jugador de fútbol}(y) \text{ in } w\}$
- c. $[[\text{Juan es alto para ser jugador de fútbol}]]^{\text{wt}}=1$ if the degree of Juan’s height is equal to or greater than the standard degree of height of members of the class of soccer players as given by function *M*. (See (15) for a definition of this function.)

Second, adjectives may have a comparison class established within the same individual, (13). This comparison class defines absolute adjectives, (14). Absolute adjectives are evaluated with respect to a comparison class comprising counterparts of the subject. Counterparts are understood as stages of the subject manifesting different degrees of the property in question in different indices. One of these degrees is considered the standard value, which is therefore conceived by default as a class-maximal/minimal value. In the case of *lleno* ‘full’, the comparison class is composed of counterparts of the predicate argument, the restaurant in this particular case, as this argument is instantiated in different stages in every contextually salient typical world. The fact that the degrees of the property in question are manifested through stages of the subject has the consequence that the standard degree selected by *M* will count as maximal or minimal (within the comparison class).⁴

- (13) $C = \lambda s. \forall w' [[w'Aw][x \text{ is } R(\text{realized}) \text{ as } s \text{ at } w' \ \& \ \{P(x)/x \text{ is related to } P\} \text{ at } s \text{ in } w']]$
- (14) a. *El restaurante está* [_{AP} *lleno*].
 ‘The restaurant is_{ESTAR} full.’
- b. Comparison class for *lleno/full*: $C = \lambda s. \forall w' [[w'Aw][x=\text{the restaurant is } R(\text{realized}) \text{ as } s \text{ at } w' \ \& \ \{P(x)/x \text{ is related to } P\} \text{ at } s \text{ in } w']]$
- c. $[[\text{El restaurante está lleno } C_{\text{pro}}]]^{\text{wt}}=1$ iff the degree of fullness of the restaurant is equal to the standard (maximal) degree of fullness of the restaurant as it would be typically instantiated (realized) as a stage *s* included in every normal world *w*’.

4. In (13), *w*’ ranges over world-time pairs; *A* is an accessibility relation that, given a world *w*, relates *w* to worlds *w*’ which are normal or where all the things that normally hold do hold (Asher & Morreau 1995). The function in (13) returns the set of stages such that for every accessible typical world *w*’, the individual *x* has a realization *s*, and *x* normally {manifests/is/is related to} *P* at *s* in *w*’ (see Gumiel-Molina, Moreno-Quibén, and Pérez-Jiménez 2015).

We claim that being absolute or relative is *not* a *lexical* property of adjectives. Our proposal is that the relative/absolute interpretation of an adjective is syntactically linked to the degree morphology with which the adjective combines. The degree morpheme, *pos* in the positive form of the adjective, is syntactically generated as the head of the Deg(ree) node present in the extended projection of gradable adjectives (Corver 1991). *Pos* introduces the type of the comparison class (Kennedy 1999; Fults 2006), which is responsible of the categorization of adjectives as absolute or relative. Specifically, the comparison class acts as a second argument of the M function introduced by *pos*, (15).⁵



The function M sets the standard degree to which the reference degree (i.e. the degree assigned to the individual by the function) is compared, and can be regarded as a “function over gradable properties [g] and comparison class properties [P]” (Fults 2006, 134). The comparison class is normally instantiated by a PP headed by *for* in English or *para* in Spanish, but it can also be instantiated by a null pronoun C, as commonly assumed in the literature, recall (14c).

In Gumiel-Molina, Moreno-Quibén, and Pérez-Jiménez (2015), it is claimed that the relative/absolute distinction explains the distribution of gradable qualifying adjectives with copular verbs in Spanish. The copulas *ser* and *estar* combine with relative and absolute adjectives respectively (recall (1)). Relative and absolute adjectives behave differently in their combination with *for*-phrases. Relative adjectives (co-occurring with *ser*) are compatible with *for*-phrases that extensionally restrict the comparison

5. This proposal is compatible with McNally’s (1994) proposal in (9) and the structure in (6). In (15) Pred introduces a predicate of events and individuals by which the predicate argument receives the thematic role of holder of a property. The PredP in (15) hooks to the VP/vP in the multidimensional structure of (6), which introduces the temporal trace or running time of an event.

class to objects that are members of the set defined by the nominal complement of the preposition *for*. *For*-phrases do co-occur with absolute adjectives (combining with *estar*) if the *for*-phrase references counterparts of the individual of which the adjective is predicated, (16) and (17).

- (16) a. *Soy bajo para ser jugador de baloncesto.*
 am_{SER} short for be_{SER} player of basketball
 ‘I am short for being a basketball-player.’
- b. *#Estoy bajo para ser jugador de baloncesto.*
 am_{ESTAR} short for be_{SER} player of basketball
- (17) a. *#Soy delgada para ser yo.*
 am_{SER} thin for be_{SER} I
 Intended: ‘I’m thin for being me.’
- b. *Estoy delgada para ser yo.*
 am_{ESTAR} thin for be_{SER} I
 ‘I look thin for being me.’

In Gumiel-Molina, Moreno-Quibén, and Pérez-Jiménez (2015), it was also claimed that the relative/absolute distinction is not a lexical property of adjectives but is built up in the syntax by functional structure (*pos*—DegP; cf. Husband 2012, a.o.). This proposal allowed us to explain the fact that most qualifying gradable adjectives are variable-behavior adjectives that behave as relative or absolute adjectives, therefore combining with *ser* or with *estar* as it was shown in (1c), repeated here for convenience.⁶

- (18) *Mi hijo {es/está} {alto / delgado / feliz,*
 my son is_{SER/ESTAR} tall thin happy
nervioso / valiente / ágil / fuerte}.
 excitable courageous agile strong
 ‘My son is {tall/thin/happy/excitable/courageous/agile/strong}.’

In *estar*-sentences, where absolute adjectives are found, the within-individual comparison class includes counterparts of the subject. Necessarily, then, there is a change regarding the degree to which the individual holds the property in different indices. Therefore, with absolute adjectives the inference of temporal persistence is not obtained. In other words, since the property contributed by the absolute adjective is evaluated with respect to stages of the subject, no inference of temporal persistence of

6. Cases of non-variability, namely *perfective adjectives* (recall (1b)), which derive from participles and combine with *estar*, and relational (non-gradable) adjectives, (1a), which are semantically modifiers of kinds (Boleda et al. 2012, among others), and combine with *ser*, receive an independent explanation. See Gumiel-Molina, Moreno-Quibén, and Pérez-Jiménez (2015).

the property with respect to the subject is available when the truth of the sentence is evaluated.

On the other hand, in *ser*-sentences, relative adjectives express the degree in which an entity has a specific property compared to other entities (between-individuals comparison class). These adjectives give rise to the inference of temporal persistence as a default inference, since in the domain of the discourse in which the sentence is evaluated, stages of the subject/property are not found, but only different individuals instantiating different degrees of the property in question.

The individual/stage distinction is thus conceived in the adjectival domain as a distinction related to the kind of elements that built up the comparison class needed to evaluate the adjectival predication.

4. Absolute secondary predicates

If the IL/SL distinction can, thus, be remodeled for qualifying gradable adjectives as proposed in the previous section, and if we accept the generalization that only SL predicates can occur as depictive secondary predicates, we expect, then, that adjectives show an absolute behavior when they occur in this syntactic environment. Consider, on the one hand, the behavior of alternating gradable adjectives (recall (1c)) with *para/for*-adjuncts. In (19), the *for*-phrase induces the formation of a within-individual comparison class (absolute interpretation of the A) in (a), and a between-individuals comparison class (relative interpretation of the A) in (b). Accordingly, the examples are differently judged.

- (19) a. *Juan llegó* [_{AP} *ágil* [_{PP} *para ser* *miércoles*]].
 Juan arrived agile for be_{SER} Wednesday
 (Context: On Wednesdays, he takes care of his parents, and generally he is tired.)
 ‘Juan arrived agile for a Wednesday.’
- b. #*Juan llegó* [_{AP} *ágil* [_{PP} *para ser* *bombero*]].
 Juan arrived agile for be_{SER} fireman
 (Context: Juan is a fireman, so, he already has the properties firemen typically have, he is strong and agile.)
 Intended: ‘Juan arrived agile for being a fireman.’

On the other hand, note that secondary predicates admit a continuation with the copula *estar*, expressing a generalization about how a given individual can be. A continuation with the copula *ser* is not possible. According to Toledo and Sassoon (2011) this inference is only triggered by absolute adjectives since only in these cases is the comparison class composed of counterparts—possible temporal stages of that same

individual in actual but not present circumstances (namely, in the past), or in normal, although not actual, circumstances. A comparison to these counterparts validates inferences concerning how the individual can be.⁷

- (20) a. *María llegó* [_{AP} *ágil*], *tan ágil como podía estar.*
 María arrived agile, as agile as could be_{ESTAR}
 ‘María arrived agile, as agile as she could have been.’
- b. #*María llegó* [_{AP} *ágil*], *tan ágil como podía ser.*
 María arrived agile, as agile as could be_{SER}
- (21) a. *María se examinó* [_{AP} *inquieta*],
 María took-the-exam restless,
tan inquieta como podía estar.
 as restless as could be_{ESTAR}
 ‘María took the exam restless, as restless as she could have been.’
- b. #*María se examinó* [_{AP} *inquieta*],
 María took-the-exam restless,
tan inquieta como podía ser.
 as restless as could be_{SER}

Note also that it is a contradiction to assert that at the time that the situation described by the main predicate holds, the referent of the secondary predicate’s controller is in the state described by the adjective, and immediately to deny that this latter state holds, (22a) and (23a). But it is not a contradiction to assert the coincidence in time of the state described by the main predication and the state expressed by the adjunct predicate, and subsequently deny that the same entity does not hold a property to the standard degree as given by the comparison class composed by other distinct individuals.

- (22) a. #*María llegó* [_{AP} *ágil*], *aunque no estaba* [_{AP} *ágil*].
 María arrived agile, although not was_{ESTAR} agile
- b. *María llegó* [_{AP} *ágil*], *aunque no era* [_{AP} *ágil*].
 María arrived agile, although not was_{SER} agile
 ‘María arrived agile, although she was not agile.’

7. These inferences are also obtained in copular sentences with *estar*, where the adjectival complement is interpreted as absolute. The sentence *María está alta* (María is_{ESTAR} tall) gives rise to the inference that *María está tan alta como puede estar* (María is_{ESTAR} as tall as she can be_{ESTAR}). On the contrary, *María es alta* (María is_{SER} tall) does not give rise to the inference that #*María es tan alta como puede ser* (María is_{SER} as tall as she can be_{SER}).

- (23) a. #*María se examinó* [_{AP} *inquieta*],
 María took-the-exam restless,
 aunque no estaba [_{AP} *inquieta*].
 although not was_{ESTAR} restless
- b. *María se examinó* [_{AP} *inquieta*],
 María took-the-exam restless,
 aunque no era [_{AP} *inquieta*].
 although not was_{SER} restless
 ‘María took the exam restless, although she was not restless.’

For the contradiction not to arise it is crucial that the adjectives are interpreted as absolute in the context of secondary predication and as relative in the context of the *ser* ‘be_{SER}’ predication. Therefore, in the previous examples the property expressed by *agile* or *restless* changes with respect to one individual, namely the referent of the subject of predication. The adjectives *agile* and *restless* select for within-individual comparison classes. Note that an example like the following, which is only possible in the context of *Alice in Wonderland*, means that Alicia’s height changed. *Alta* ‘tall’ is necessarily interpreted in this context as an absolute adjective.

- (24) *Alicia entró en la habitación alta y salió baja.*
 Alicia went in-to the room tall and came-out short
 ‘Alicia went into the room tall and came out short.’

We conclude, thus, that adjectives are necessarily interpreted as absolute in the context of depictive secondary predication. At this point, two questions arise:

- a. If all gradable adjectives can be interpreted as relative or absolute (i.e., if all qualifying gradable adjectives are *alternating adjectives*, except for *perfective adjectives*), why are the examples in (8) judged as degraded (ungrammatical/infelicitous)? (Recall the contrast between (8) and (10).)
- b. Why can only absolute adjectives be secondary predicates?

We will try to answer these questions in the following sections.

5. The role of the dimension of the adjective

If any alternating gradable adjective can be built up in the syntax as relative or absolute, why is it so difficult for some adjectives, like *alto/tall*, *bajo/short*, *inteligente/intelligent*, to be construed as secondary predicates? Why are the examples in (8) judged as degraded (ungrammatical/infelicitous)? How can we explain the contrast between (8) and (10)?

We claim that this is a consequence of the specific dimension expressed by the adjectives involved, plus the simultaneity requirement imposed by the secondary predication context. Adjectives like *alto/tall* or *inteligente/intelligent* express properties with respect to which entities do not show rapid changes. The dimension of the adjective makes it difficult to compare different stages of the subject in a short span of time (as forced by the timespan associated with the main predication), a characteristic that seems to be necessary for the simultaneity condition to be satisfied. Only in severely constrained contexts, like (25) (which seem to be “magic contexts”), is it possible to compare the degrees of height of different stages of the subject in short spans of time.

- (25) *Alicia tomó la pócima mágica que la hacía cambiar*
 Alicia drank the potion magic that her made change
de tamaño en unos segundos, así que se sentó a jugar al
 of size in some seconds, so that SE sat to play to.the
ajedrez [_{AP} *alta*] y *terminó la partida* [_{AP} *bajita*].
 chess tall and finished the game short
 ‘As soon as Alice drank the magic potion, her size changed, so she started playing chess tall and end up playing short.’

6. Why are secondary predicates absolute adjectives?

The crucial question to be answered now is why the absolute interpretation of the adjective is the one obtained in the context of secondary predication. Where does this constraint come from?

In previous approaches, the licensing of adjectives as secondary predicates is usually explained in terms of an identification requirement applying to the secondary predicate and the main verb. For example, Hernanz (1988) claims that secondary predicates are licensed via *thematic identification* with the main verb: only those adjectives encoding an eventive variable <e> (i.e., SL adjectives) can occur as secondary predicates since only in those cases can the eventive variable of the adjective and the eventive variable encoded by the main verb be thematically identified. Therefore, stative verbs are predicted not to license depictive secondary predicates:

- (26) #*Pedro sabe francés contento.*
 Pedro knows French happy
 Intended: ‘Pedro knows French when he is happy.’

Similarly, Jiménez (2000) claims that adjectives have aspectual features that must match the aspectual features of the main verb (encoded in an ASP node). Only those adjectives with a [+perfective] feature (i.e., SL adjectives) can satisfy the aspectual feature of [+perfective] verbs. Any other combination of features will make the derivation

crash. Therefore, only SL adjectives can be depictive secondary predicates, and only non-stative verbs can support them. We will come back to stative verbs in Section 6.

Within the proposal developed in this paper, the reason why only absolute adjectives appear as depictive secondary predicates is the following. When the main predicate of the clause is not stative, it introduces in the domain of discourse an event in which the entity argument/the subject is a participant. Hence, stages of the subject of predication are readily available and stand out in the discourse context favoring the compatibility with an adjectival comparison class that includes stages. In consequence, the absolute interpretation of alternating gradable adjectives acting as secondary predicates is favored. This is the case in (27), where alternating adjectives receive an absolute interpretation, as has been shown above.

- (27) a. *María llegó* [_{AP} *alegre*].
 María arrived happy
 ‘María arrived happy.’
- b. *María se examinó* [_{AP} *fuerte*].
 María took-the-exam strong
 ‘María took the physical exam being strong.’

In these cases, the simultaneity condition governing the well-formedness of secondary predication structures is non-trivially met. Since the property contributed by the absolute adjective is evaluated with respect to stages of the subject, no inference of temporal persistence of the property with respect to the subject is available, and simultaneity is relevant and informative: there is a moment in the past in which *María* arrives and is happy simultaneously. The assertion that this particular temporal interval exists is not trivial from the point of view of information sharing.

A relative interpretation of alternating adjectives in this context is disfavored and, moreover, would give rise to a violation of the simultaneity constraint. Relative adjectives, expressing the degree in which an entity has a specific property compared to other entities (between-individuals comparison class), give rise to the inference of temporal persistence which makes the simultaneity constraint trivial, as claimed by McNally (1994) for IL predicates.

When the context (specifically the main verb) does not provide stages of the entity argument, the absolute interpretation of alternating adjectives acting as secondary predicates is very hard to get and the predication as a whole cannot receive a coherent interpretation. This is precisely what we find when the main predicate of the clause is a stative predicate. In this case secondary predication with alternating adjectives is generally odd.

- (28) a. *#María sabe francés* [_{AP} *ágil*].
 María knows French agile
 Intended: ‘María knows French (when she is) agile.’

- b. #A *María le gustan los coches* [_{AP} *alta*].
 to María to-her like the cars tall
 Intended: 'María likes cars (when she is) tall.'

Stative predicates are spatiotemporally independent: the entities participating in these states will do so no matter what their spatiotemporal location happens to be (McNally 1998; Magri 2009). In this particular context, stages of the subject/entity argument do not stand out because the discourse is populated with entities and not with stages of the argument. The formation of within-individual comparison classes is disfavored and the adjective acting as a secondary predicate is interpreted as relative. In these cases, the simultaneity condition on the coextensive parts of the situation expressed by the main and secondary predication is trivially met, hence uninformative, and the whole sentence is infelicitous.

When the stative predicate combines with an absolute adjective whose comparison class is made up of stages that vary across a very short span of time and are spatiotemporally dependent (which is always the case with *perfective adjectives* like *sobrio/sober* or *dormido/asleep*, recall (1b)), the sentence greatly improves and the inference of temporal persistence associated to the main predicate is suspended (McNally 1994). In (29), we infer that María likes cars when and only when she is sober or that María loves Juan when and only when she is asleep. The stages comprising the within-individual comparison of the absolute perfective adjectives introduce into the discourse context a salient time that sets up a temporal limit to the temporal persistence associated with the main predication, whose effect is the cancellation of the inference. Then, the assertion of the simultaneity between the events is not trivial and it is not uninformative.

- (29) a. A *María* [_{VP} *le gustan los coches*] [_{AP} *sobria*].
 to María to-her like the cars sober
 'María likes the cars (when she is) sober.'
- b. *María* [_{VP} *ama a Juan*] [_{AP} *dormida*].
 María loves to Juan asleep
 'María loves John (when she is) asleep.'

The IL/SL distinction that has been proposed to explain the aforementioned differences in the context of secondary predication can thus be understood, in the domain of gradable adjectives, as a distinction related to the kind of elements that build up the comparison class needed to evaluate the adjectival property, together with the inference of temporal persistence.

Between-individual and within-individual comparison classes give rise to two different types of gradable adjectives, relative and absolute ones. If an adjective is evaluated with respect to a comparison class comprising counterparts of an individual, the property manifested by the counterparts of the individual in different indices must be interpreted as subject to variation. Therefore, the inference of temporal persistence which seems to be at the basis of the individual-level character of predicates (McNally

1994; Percus 1997; Magri 2009) does not arise, giving rise to the stage-level interpretation. On the other hand, the inference of temporal persistence arises as a default inference in the case of relative adjectives since in the comparison class selected by these adjectives there are no stages instantiating different degrees of the property but just individuals manifesting different degrees of it.

Moreover, it must be taken into account that secondary predication environments are subject to a general coherence constraint which, at this point, seems to us the only way to explain the contrast between (26) and (29), also exemplified in (30). The fact that adjectives like *contento* express psychological states, vs. adjectives like *borracho* (Marín 2001), could perhaps open a way to understand this contrast, a matter that we leave for further research.

- (30) a. #*Juan teme las tormentas* {*contento/ nervioso*}.
 Juan fears the storms happy nervous
- b. *Juan teme las tormentas* {*borracho/ sobrio*}.
 Juan fears the storms drunk sober
 ‘Juan fears storms when he is {drunk/sober}.’

7. Conclusions

In this paper, we claim that the IL/SL distinction is connected to the semantics of gradable adjectives via comparison class formation. Between-individuals and within-individual comparison classes give rise to two different types of gradable adjectives, relative and absolute ones. We thus argue for an extension of the explanatory value of the IL/SL distinction to the domain of gradability. Under this new point of view, we have argued that the IL/SL distinction in the domain of secondary predication can be connected to the relative/absolute distinction.

The hypothesis that we have put forward is that gradable adjectives that act as secondary predicates must be interpreted as absolute. Adjectives can be syntactically construed as absolute or relative, and a combination of semantic and pragmatic factors conspires to favor the absolute interpretation of the gradable adjective in the context of secondary predication.

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